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561 796 sub-tribe of Kutigi, Enagi, and Dabbā, the *gani* even dramatizes the age-grade structure itself, its system of ranks, and the promotion from grade to grade. The *gani* assigns different ceremonial duties to the different grades, and involves certain symbolic tests of manhood of progressive severity which the different age-grades, one after the other, must undergo. The ceremony can, in fact, be regarded as a ritual of age-grade initiation. However, I must leave the description of this ceremony, closely associated though it is with the conception of age-grades, for a future occasion.

Let us turn to the Mohammedan religious ceremonies. At the celebration of the *Sallah* the age-grade associations play a much less specific role. They arrange a small festivity in the house of their group captains on the eve of the *Sallah*, at which—as in all houses of Bida and Mohammedan Nupe on that evening—a ram is killed and eaten. On the following morning the various *ena* of the town meet in the market to join the thousands of people who will follow the royal procession to the mosque and round the town walls, and gather later in front of the Emir's house, listening to drummers and musicians, and watching the display of the horsemen and the coming and going of the royal guests.

The celebration of the Mohammedan New Year, on the other hand, called *navū* in Nupe (lit. torches), represents the climax of the public appearances of the Bida *ena*. The *navū* is essentially a festival of youth. Its ritual acts, which appear to express, symbolically, the death and renewal of the year, are carried out by the young folk of Bida. On the eve of the New Year, at sunset, all the age-grade associations meet in the houses of their captains, and then march to the market of their town quarter, where all the associations of the *ekpā* forgather. They carry burning torches of grass in their hands, and are clad in simple, scanty garments. Three long processions, one in each *ekpā*, move slowly through the streets of Bida, down to the arm of the river flowing through that part of the town. The boys sing and dance while they walk, and throw their torches high up in the air, catching them as they fall. Arrived at the river, they take off their garments, and, clad only in a loin-cloth, wade into the water. There is no atmosphere of ritual or ceremony about it; they splash and play in the water, dance, wrestle, sing, and laugh at the clumsiness of those who drop and extinguish their torches. All the time the torch-play goes on; they play with the torches like balls, throwing and catching them. It is a dangerous game: I saw many lucky escapes, and quite a few incidents not so lucky.

561 796 786 519 Girls and young women, too, go to the river to bathe on the *navū*, and the sexual attraction adds its stimulus to the general excitement. The *navū* is, in fact, the only occasion on which I have seen the Nupe indulge in open, undisguised, sexual play. Torches are thrown into the water to light up the spot where girls are bathing almost naked; boys accost girls in the water, and couples disappear in the dark of the river-banks. But the *navū* is in more than one respect a period of licence. Indeed, more important than this amorous play is the licence which was extended till about fifteen years ago to all acts of violence and assault that might occur on *navū* night. And such liberty of action was not

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limited to acts of violence committed unwittingly, in the course of the torch throwing and playful fighting. The torch processions invariably led to serious organized fights between the three *ena* groups from the three divisions of the town. On their way back from the river one *ena* would ambush another, and try to invade its 'territory'. A fierce fight would ensue, lasting the whole night, fought with torches, sticks, stones, and even formerly (as my older informants maintained) with swords and guns. Serious wounds and loss of eyesight were a common feature of these 'battles of youth', which were fought with all the violence of heated party feuds. For party feuds they were—inspired by the political rivalry that is embodied in the threefold dynastic division of the kingdom. Let us reflect that the *navū* provides the only occasion at which all the scattered age-grade groups of Bida are united in common action. The unity which they achieve is typical of Bida society—a unity based on partisanship and political factions. The acts of violence committed in the *navū* fights led the Administration to intervene, and the fights were forbidden under *Etsu* Bello. Yet the memory is still vividly alive. Younger and older men who have once participated in a fight still proudly recount their feats which helped their side to win. But even young boys, novices at the *navū*, are aware of the traditional significance of the ceremony. At the *navū* of 1936 schoolboys from the Middle School had been encouraged by their teachers to send, for the first time, an official contingent to the *navū* procession and to take their place among the age-grade groups. The boys did not anticipate a 'proper' *navū*; for, as they explained to the director of the school, if they were to behave according to traditional standards, 'the *yan doka* (police) would get nasty'.

Certain important activities and obligations embodied in the age-grade association outlive the lifetime of the *ena* and accompany the individual through his whole adult life. The celebration of kinship events with the co-operation of age-grade associations is a first instance. All members of an *ena* are required to appear at the kinship feasts celebrated in the house of one of the *ena* members, and this duty applies both to comrades and ex-comrades. When a man celebrates the naming ceremony of a new-born child, or the wedding of himself or a close relative, or when he buries his father or elder brother, he will expect all his old comrades to come, to bring their congratulations or condolences, and to join the family guests. The Nupe greatly appreciate kinship festivities on an imposing scale, with a large—and generous—attendance. Age-grade loyalty is thus enlisted to make the festivities a success and to add to the prestige of the host. The readiness of the ex-members of an *ena* to fulfil these social obligations towards an old comrade depends, however, on the rank which he had held in the *ena*, and on the popularity which he enjoyed among his fellow members. If the age-grade association is thus designed to contribute to the social prestige of its ex-members in adult life, this dependence on the goodwill of one's comrades must, in anticipation, act as an important controlling influence upon behaviour in the age-grade association itself.

There exists also a certain clearly formulated code of conduct which

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The dance frequently rises to feverish excitement, when the youths will suddenly resume using their whips, violently and against anyone. The flogging now has a purpose: when directed against male adolescents it is thought to promote growth and maturity; when directed against women, fertility. But there are also phases of calm as well as humorous episodes, acclaimed by general laughter. One episode, in particular, may be mentioned: now and again, the young men will imitate, with comic exaggeration, a typical women's dance or caricature the walk and gestures of women.

I will not describe the dance further: it fills the rest of the *gunnu* festivities, being interrupted only for a brief night's rest, and ends when all the beer is exhausted and everyone too tired to carry on. I will only note these important and partly unique features. Some time during the dance the young men form themselves into a procession led by the *Ndazo* and march and dance through the village, still singing the *gunnu* songs, to give the 'salute' in front of the houses of high-ranking elders. On the way they also visit the childless women of the village; for these are strictly forbidden to watch the *gunnu* dance and must hide in their huts until the ceremonial is over. These women may be unhappily barren; or they may be suspected of avoiding childbearing and family duties so that they might lead the immoral life of female traders and prostitutes (which, in Nupe, means one and the same thing). In either case the *Ndazo* will enter their house and encourage or admonish them, as the case may be; the woman, kneeling before him, will receive two lashes with the *gunnu* whip, administered by one of the young men, which is both a punishment and a promise of fertility. Women who have no taste for either will have to leave the village or hide in some other house during the critical period, as indeed quite a few are doing.

Again, few other Nupe rituals include a mixed dance of the sexes; in the *gunnu*, this is not only permitted but considered a relevant part of the celebration, as is the whole excited and abandoned tone of the dance. Always, when describing the *gunnu*, the Nupe will use some such phrase—'we make merry, we drink, we dance, men and women together without order, until we talk without sense'. This excitement is in no small measure sexual; not only is the attention of the young men constantly drawn to the other sex (even by the fact that they wear an item of women's dress), but the week preceding the *gunnu* and the whole period of the celebration are also marked by a severe prohibition of all sexual intercourse, lest death visit the community. Only when the dance is ended and everyone has bathed, the men in a nearby stream, the women at home, is the rule of chastity lifted; the same night men and women will again sleep together, matrimonially or promiscuously—no one cares.

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risk of divorce or even of their husbands' serious anger. The ritual alone seriously and publicly brands immorality or subjects barren women to a 'cure' which is indistinguishable from punishment.

Thirdly, the hectic mood of the *gunnu* dance is a model 'in reverse'. For this kind of abandoned behaviour is never permitted or thought of in ordinary life, and any open reference to sex is severely shunned by the rather prudish Nupe. Sex and privacy go together; and no ordinary dance permits a mingling of the sexes. Indeed, in all ordinary dances and in most ceremonial ones the whole mood is one of calm and restraint. Perhaps, then, we may call the *gunnu* (and one or two similar ceremonials) a safety-valve, a licensed compensation for otherwise rigid self-control; certainly, it puts a premium on a mode of behaviour otherwise not only improper but unthinkable.

The final instance, again taken from the *gunnu*, is of a slightly different order. I am referring to the masquerading of the boys as girls. 'Masquerading' is possibly too strong a word, for all that happens is that the boys wear a piece of woman's cloth.[1] But this aspect of the *gunnu* dress is always specifically mentioned, and in the general dance the boys are encouraged to imitate and caricature female steps and mannerisms. Now in 'real' life boys or men are never expected to behave like the opposite sex. From the time when children put on any dress at all (when they are about six or seven), they are dressed differently. As soon as the boys form themselves into the earliest age grade (at the age of eight or nine), the occupations, interests, and codes of conduct of the sexes differ sharply, and this is true also of songs, dances, and pastimes of all kinds. Male homosexuality, which would blur this dividing line, is severely condemned and, in fact, denied to occur. The exceptional behaviour at the *gunnu* thus appears to have a symbolic significance (though it is not stated more explicitly), the temporary change of roles pointing to a more permanent one. The boys who are admitted to the *gunnu* are on the threshold of manhood, the very admission to the ritual being a first token of the new status. Before that they were something else—children, still looked after by their mothers as much as by their fathers, and being with women more often than with men. Later, this ambiguous position will come to an end, which change roughly coincides with admission to the *gunnu*. The symbolic identification with the female sex on that occasion thus emphasizes the transition through concentrating it into something like 'a last time' when boys can be confused with girls. It is not literally a 'last time'; for even before this event boys did not walk about dressed like girls or behaved

[1] In the *gani* ceremonial, to be described later, this 'masquerading' is much more elaborate and definite (see below, p. 218).

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the king'. Thus led, the age grades walk in procession through the village to salute the chief and all the other notables of the community, join in the dancing, engage in wrestling matches, and meet one another in a realistic 'battle', to be described presently. The esoteric rite of the *gani*, the 'burial service' mentioned before, is performed by the leaders alone, in a secret place away from the scene of the public festivities. The younger boys are all dressed up as girls and imitate, in exaggerated and ridiculous fashion, the walk and dance steps of the women. This masquerade, though highly elaborate and considered a most relevant aspect of the celebration, is not further explained; but the context makes it clear that it carries the same meaning of a change of roles which underlies the similar mummery of the *gunnu*.[1] For this meaning is again expressed, now by means of a conspicuous symbolism which everyone understands, in certain other episodes of the *gani*, meant to dramatize the admission of the novices and the various promotions from grade to grade. There is the 'death and burial', loudly mourned by the crowd, of a 'little girl', indicating the abandonment of infancy by the young boys about to enter the first grade. In a preceding phase a 'little boy' is similarly buried and mourned, that is, shown to abandon boyhood for adolescence. Lastly, the youths of the most senior grade appear dressed up as 'warriors' and 'horsemen', meeting their juniors in a mock battle which seems to symbolize the final stage of adolescence, when youth must hold its own against adults, compete and struggle with them, and break into their ranks. All these things actually happen in the 'battle', whose very realism seems symbolic of the severe competition for position and power which characterizes Nupe life. In brief, the *gani* ceremonial is a typical *rite de passage*, dramatizing the crucial phases of male adolescence and adoption into manhood. Seen against this background, an ususual feature of the *gani*, too, falls into place. Obscene sexual jokes and allusions, normally never used, appear in the *gani* songs and are freely bandied about during the festivities, both by old and young: we may conclude that they serve to throw into relief a final aspect of adolescence, sexual maturity.

The ceremonial lasts three days, and each day concludes with a hectic dance in which the sexes meet in utterly unrestrained fashion. Nor does this unrestraint end with the dance; for during the three nights all the normal rules of sex morality are in abeyance. This temporary abandonment of moral restraint, which applies to every person in the community, implies, of course, more than merely a symbolic reference to adolescence and sexual maturity. It represents one of those periodical concessions to moral

[1] See above, p. 113.

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or sexual licence which are familiar from many societies, primitive and advanced. We know that they occur also in the traditional annual celebration of the *gunnu*. And here it seems significant that the people of Kutigi and the other communities now performing the *gani* have abandoned the *gunnu* in this fixed, annual form.[1] Whatever other reasons have contributed to the abandonment of the annual *gunnu*, the fact that it shared with the *gani* this one feature may well have been decisive; for it would seem to be in the very nature of this concession to unrestraint that it must not be duplicated.

There is evidence to show that the sexual licence belonged to the *gani* already in its original form in which it reached Nupe country. This original *gani* equally included some connection, apparently broad and unspecific, with age-grade life and male adolescence.[2] To some extent, then, the Nupe found in the *gani* a cult fortuitously congenial to their own interests and ideas. But let us note that the *gani* expresses them with unaccustomed sharpness: the masquerade of boys as girls, sketchily treated in the *gunnu*, is fully exploited in the *gani*; and nowhere else is age-grade life dramatized with such effect.

Other 'Nupeisms' in the *gani* are clearly the result of adaptation and remodelling. Thus, though the ceremonial retained its original name, its songs and prayers are in Nupe; the latter, spoken at the secret 'burial service', conclude with the typical Nupe formula—'May the whole town have health'; the musical instruments, the music itself, the dance steps, and the whole design of the ceremonial, with an esoteric part preceding the public 'merry-making'—all these are taken from the traditional practice. Yet equally, the *gani* contains conspicuously novel and 'un-Nupe' features. The very notion of a ceremonial having a proper plot and being staged as a drama with consecutive scenes has no parallel in Nupe. The same is true of the precise symbolism of the *gani* and of the masquerade of warriors and horsemen: the latter, incidentally, appear as riders of hobby-horses, which mummery is equally unknown in the rest of Nupe. So are the standards with which the age grades parade during the ceremonial, some of which are combined with crude symbols of the sexes. The open eroticism of the *gani*, finally, contrasts strikingly with the normal mood of Nupe ceremonials.

[1] See above, p. 83. It will be remembered that the performance of the *gunnu* as a movable rite (which is still practised in Kutigi) does not include the 'mixed' dance and the period of erotic licence.

[2] The evidence in question is based on accounts of the *gani* celebrations in its country of origin and among the nomadic Fulani. See *Africa*, vol. XIX, 1949, p. 177, n. 2.

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that the all-too-broad unity of Islam is (as I put it before) narrowed down to the scope of a national church.

The *navũ* is to some extent a smaller replica of the *salla*, including, again, the state procession to the mosque, with all its display of royal splendour and evoking the same festive mood of a large city bent on enjoyment. But the royal display occupies only a brief phase, on the morning of New Year's Day; and the enjoyment has a new emphasis, on youth, and on moral licence.

On the eve of New Year, at nightfall, the young people of Bida, both youths and girls, forgather at the three streams that cross the town. The girls come in little groups, while the boys and young men are formed into companies, each composed of an age-grade association under its leader. They sing and dance on the way, and the youths all carry torches, which they swing or throw high up in the air, and sometimes brandish at one another in playful attacks. Arrived at the river the youths remove their gowns and the girls their upper garments, and thus stripped to the waist wade into the water. They splash about, with much shrieking and laughing, try dance steps, jumps and somersaults, and the boys engage in brief wrestling bouts, invariably terminated by a ducking. Now and again this clowning gives way to a mock battle, when the boys will thrust and throw the torches at one another, age-group fighting age-group, not seriously, but keenly and with marked excitement. It needs skill to catch the wildly flying firebrands or to parry those aimed at you. Nor are narrow escapes uncommon, and first-aid treatments for burns are a regular aftermath of the *navũ*. The excitement of the fight, moreover, is matched by the openly erotic excitement provoked by the occasion. This is indeed unique; at no other time will Nupe girls disrobe in the presence of men or show themselves with bare breasts. The girls will keep to the dark side of the river; but the youths throw torches in their direction to surprise a girl while she is undressing or bathing. There is cruder horseplay, too, the boys trying to seize the girls or to bump into them as though unwittingly; while in the shadows and under the bridge couples pursue their amorous play unseen. But though there is plenty of teasing and joking, the language is never obscene. About midnight the bathing breaks up and the young people return to their homes.

This prelude to the *navũ* was not always so tame. Until fairly recently the mock battle of torches was meant quite seriously.[1] The three different bathing places are chosen in accordance with the threefold dynastic division of the city, and are visited by the age-grade associations in the respective local division. The diverse

[1] The word 'battle' has been chosen advisedly. All informants describing the usage emphasized that it was 'like a war'.

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loyalties which govern the town hold their sway over youth as well as adults; and on the occasion of the *navũ* the factional jealousies, never fully submerged, were allowed to come into the open. Thus the torch processions invariably led to organized and heated fights between the three groups; on the way back from the river, especially, one would ambush the other or try to invade the rival territory. The battle is said to have lasted the whole night, being fought with torches, sticks, stones, and any handy weapons. Injuries (some say, even death) inflicted in the course of the *navũ* went unpunished; for on this one night the law of the land was suspended. Eventually, in 1920 or thereabouts, the excesses of this all-too realistic play forced the Government to intervene and to forbid this phase of the *navũ*.

In spite of its realism, however, the mock battle not only legitimized factional hostility but also diverted it into relatively harmless channels. For though the boys and youths would give vent to sentiments commonly felt, they themselves were still outside serious politics and not yet genuinely caught up in factional strife. They would still be play-acting, however realistically, much as their whole age-grade life, with its imitation of adult ranks and ambitions, is play-acting and a make-believe copy of 'real life'. For the population of the city, whose sons and brothers took part in the 'battle of youth', this was in the nature of a vicarious and controlled catharsis of tensions grown over the year; for the young fighters, it was the climax of age-grade life and a seal set to this 'education for citizenship'. Needless to say, the practice is still vividly remembered. And it is not only the older people who talk nostalgically about their more exciting youth; the young people today have preserved at least the idea of the thing. Small boys with whom I talked before the *navũ* explained to me with great glee all that they and their age mates were going to do to their 'enemies'. In the end, of course, they did nothing; so that today the 'battle of youth' has moved a further stage towards mere make-believe.[1]

The licensed aggression of the torch festival reappears on the next day in a new context, that of kinship. For the *navũ* is also an occasion for *ma dzo*, for 'joking', that is, for the licensed liberties commonly referred to as 'joking relationship'. Though much less formalized than in other African societies, the institution of joking relationship plays a clearly defined part in Nupe social life. The individuals standing in this relationship are called *dzomanci*, 'playmates', the relationship itself being derived mainly from kinship position. Thus the joking relationship obtains between grandparents and grandchildren of the opposite sex; between cross

[1] See also *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 396–7.